

Medway Council
Meeting of Children and Young People Overview and
Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 1 December 2021

6.30pm to 9.20pm

Record of the meeting

Subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of this committee

- Present:** Councillors: Kemp (Chairman), Barrett, Carr, Cooper, Sylvia Griffin, Johnson, Purdy, Tejan, Thorne, Tranter and Mrs Elizabeth Turpin
- Substitutes:** Councillors:
Murray (Substitute for Howcroft-Scott)
Price (Substitute for Osborne)
- In Attendance:** Emma Banks, Detective Chief Superintendent, Kent Police
Maria Beaney, Finance Business Partner, Education
Celia Buxton, Assistant Director Education and Send
Katey Durkin, Head of Finance Strategy
Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People - Children and Adults' Services
Donna Marriott, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care
Sam Paterson, Supporting Families Programme Manager
Rory Patterson
Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer
Colin Thompson, Consultant in Public Health
Paula Wilkins, Chief Nurse, NHS Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group

487 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Howcroft-Scott, Lammas, Opara, Osborne and Chrissy Stamp and from Clive Mailing (Roman Catholic Diocese representative) and Keith Clear (Medway Parent and Carer Forum).

488 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 30 September 2021 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

489 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

490 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

Councillor Purdy declared an OSI in any references made to Kyndi Ltd, of which she had been appointed as a Director. She confirmed that if Kyndi was referred to during the meeting then she would withdraw from the meeting during the discussion and vote on the relevant item.

Other interests

Councillor Cooper declared an interest in relation to Medway Voluntary Action (MVA), which was referred to in item 5 (Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report) as she was a befriender of MVA.

491 Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) Annual Report 2020-21

Discussion:

The current Chair of the Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) Executive introduced the report, highlighting that safeguarding had remained a priority and focus throughout the covid-19 pandemic. She also drew attention to the independent review of the partnership which identified strengths and areas for improvement and highlighted the strengthened relationship with schools.

Members then raised a number of questions and comments, which included:

- **Neglect** – in response to a question about the profile and awareness relating to child neglect and how that was managed across the system it was confirmed that neglect was a focus for the partnership and it was a priority area for learning from reviews and was an issue that needed to be tackled at pre-parenting and early parenting stages.
- **Child death reviews** – reference was made to some of these reviews not being completed (as detailed in the report) and confirmation was given that many of these related to child deaths from illnesses such as cancer or deaths caused by road traffic accidents. Learning from serious incidents was effective and the learning was being picked up and disseminated across the system
- **Cookham Wood** – reference was made to the recent inspection of Cookham Wood and concern was raised in relation to the overall wellbeing of those young people at Cookham Wood. The Director of

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People confirmed that the partnership continued to work closely with the secure estate to ensure improvements were progressed and achieved.

- **Gang strategy** – it was undertaken by the partnership to circulate the Gang Strategy when finalised.
- **Engagement** – reference was made to some partner organisations feeling less connected under the new MSCP arrangements, which came in to effect during 2019. The Independent Scrutineer explained that the new arrangements involved fewer partner organisations at the high level meetings and the change needed to be embedded but confirmed that the MSCP held regular leadership events to include as many partners as possible and was proactive as a partnership.
- **Domestic Abuse** – in response to a question about whether any work was done to support perpetrators of domestic abuse, it was confirmed that there was a large amount of work and support across the partnership to support victims, children and abusers. A programme had been developed to provide therapeutic support to perpetrators that met the criteria.
- **Child Protection Plan (CPP) numbers** – in response to a question about how confident Medway was that it had the right children with a CPP, officers confirmed that this remained an area of focus. At the time of Medway's inspection, the numbers of children with a CPP were very high which was due to drift and delay. Extensive work had taken place to reduce this drift and delay, leading to much fewer children on CPPs. Work was underway as part of the ongoing improvement to ensure that the right children were on the right plan at the right time. This was likely to lead to an increase in the numbers of children on a CPP, more in line with statistical neighbours as this was re-calibrated.
- **Voice of children and families** – in response to a question about the survey, officers confirmed that the survey (referred to on page 45 of the agenda) had been conducted online and due to the pandemic and lockdowns, they had not been able to offer alternative ways of accessing the survey, such as through schools.
- **Out of area children** – concern was raised about the support children placed in Medway by other local authorities received. Officers confirmed that although these children would access partner services in the normal way, their relationship with children's social care was limited as they remained the responsibility of the local authority that placed them.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

492 Missing Children

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Children's Social Care, introduced the report which set out how the process relating to missing children was managed and provided data for the period April 2020 to March 2021.

Members then raised a number of questions and comments, which included:

- **Timing of the report** – in response to a request, officers undertook to provide the report earlier in the year in future to ensure less data lag.
- **Medway children out of area** – in response to questions regarding the timeliness and delivery of return home visits for Medway children placed outside of Medway, officers confirmed this remained an area of focus for improvement and that commissioning arrangements for this work were being reviewed to ensure that a more efficient and effective service was delivered for these children.
- **Information sharing with other agencies** – it was confirmed that when a child went missing, there were mechanisms in place to ensure wider agencies including transport companies at a national level, were informed. It was also confirmed that partners worked to identify trends which particularly enabled swift interventions for repeat missing incidents.
- **Criteria for being classified as missing** – Officers confirmed that there was no set time period for being considered a missing child. If someone was concerned about a child's safety and it was outside of their routine then they would be recorded as missing immediately. The Police initially determine what the level of risk is, and then this is further assessed in liaison with partners to determine next steps.
- **Data gathering** – in response to a question about the quality of the data gathered and how it was used, officers confirmed this was an area of work that was still being developed but it was important to inform intelligence, recognise themes and trends and identify any particular hot spot areas or risks of exploitation.
- **Support for out of area children placed in Medway** – concern was raised at how such children were supported in such circumstances if they were not adequately support by their original local authority. Officers confirmed that those children were provided with a return home interview by the Police and Medway would liaise closely with the child's home local authority. It was also confirmed that unaccompanied asylum seeker children were a particularly vulnerable group of children and were always classed at high risk and a criminal investigation would be opened to determine any organised criminal activity in specific circumstances.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

493 Supporting Families Programme

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Children Social Care introduced the report which provided an update on the progress and the achievements of the Supporting Families Programme (previously Troubled Families) in Medway during phase 2 (2015 to 2022).

Members then raised a number of questions and comments, which included:

- **Apprentices (Medway Council)** – in response to a question about whether any were care leavers, it was confirmed there were not currently, but there were current vacancies which had been shared with the 16+ Team and the Youth Service.
- **Government grant** – in response to a question about the Government grant, it was confirmed that in the Chancellor's statement he referred to £200m of grant funding, so officers were comfortable that funding of the programme would continue and may expand. The final settlement was anticipated week commencing 13 December 2021.
- **Partnership working** – officers confirmed that the team worked closely with Early Help and the Family Solutions Teams, as well as wider partnership working with services such as health visiting and midwifery.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

494 Draft Capital and Revenue Budget 2022/23

Discussion:

The Head of Finance Strategy introduced the report which set out the draft budget proposals for 2022/2023. She highlighted the budget setting process and the key assumptions that had been taken into account. She highlighted the pressure of placement costs which was currently the biggest factor attributable to the £18m gap and confirmed officers were working hard to find solutions to mitigate this.

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Members then raised a number of questions and comments, which included:

- **Reserves** – officers confirmed that although there was no guarantee of not using reserves, it would not be something officers would want to build a budget on as this would not be sustainable.
- **Sustainability of children’s services investment** – concern was raised about the sustainability of the previous investment that had been made in children’s services as part of the improvement journey. Officers reassured the Committee that that previous investment did form part of the base budget and it was the costs of placements activity and the provider market that was increasing the budget gap.

Decision:

- (1) The Committee noted that Cabinet had instructed officers to continue to work with Portfolio Holders in formulating robust proposals to balance the budget for 2022/23 and beyond.
- (2) The Committee recommended that its comments on the draft budget be fed back to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January.
- (3) The Committee noted that the timetable for consideration by overview and scrutiny was as follows:

Business Support	25 November 2021
Children and Young People (this report)	1 December 2021
Regeneration, Culture and Environment	2 December 2021
Health and Adult Social Care	9 December 2021
Business Support	27 January 2022
Cabinet	8 February 2022
Council	24 February 2022

495 Medway People Strategy 2021-2025

Discussion:

The Director of People – Children and Adults Services introduced the report which presented the draft Medway People Strategy to the Committee for its consideration. The strategy was ambitious for citizens of all ages and would provide a blueprint that all other strategies within the children and adults directorate would fall under.

Members then raised a number of comments and questions, which included:

- **Waterfront city** – reference was made to this term used in the strategy and it was considered this was not representative for all in Medway.

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- **Educational attainment** – it was queried whether the following statement; “Educational attainment is one of the strongest predictors of how long and well an individual will live; and helps break the cycle of inequality” was correct and should not in fact refer to health.
- **Ambitious** – comment was made at how ambitious the strategy was and also whether it should more directly deal with diversity issues. In response, the Director of People – Children and Adults Services confirmed that the strategy was ambitious and was high level with issues around diversity tailored throughout other strategies that underpin this. The Director confirmed that she believed by 2025 Medway would have made a great deal of progress in relation to the strategy and its ambitions.
- **Council wide and partnership working** – comment was made that different departments within the Council did not always work together effectively in wrapping services around an individual. The Director confirmed her view that the vision borne from the strategy would drive better ways of working across Council services. She added that the strategy enabled the Council to be clear with partners what the vision and ambition for Medway’s people looked like and formed a base line to set out what was trying to be achieved.
- **Performance monitoring** – in response to a question about how progress would be monitored, the Director confirmed that each ambition would have an outcome measure that would sit under the relevant directorate and would appear in a number of ways, not least Council Plan monitoring. She also confirmed her intention to report back to the committee on progress at relevant intervals.

Decision:

The Committee recommended Cabinet to:

- approve Medway’s new People Strategy as set out at Appendix 1 to the report
- approve the governance and delivery model set out in Section 4 of the report.
- delegate authority for delivery to the Director of People (Statutory DCAS) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services (Lead Member) and the Portfolio Holder for Adults’ Services, to make any minor amendments needed to the strategy and finalise the key performance indicators in Appendix A of the Strategy document before its final publication.

The Committee also noted that the Health and Wellbeing Board will monitor the key themes to ensure strategic oversight for Medway.

496 Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report & Risk Register Quarter 2
2021/22

Discussion:

The Director of People – Children and Adults Services, introduced the report and, with colleagues, highlighted the indicators that were underperforming.

This included:

- Completion of Child and Family assessments – this had been attributable to some vacancies and a small number of families who were delayed by a day or two, not extensively.
- 16-17 year olds not in employment, education or training (NEET) – this remained a challenge which had been impacted on by the Covid-19 pandemic. Work continued to strengthen the offer and re-engage young people.
- Persistent absence – it was explained that 12.1% of absences had been recorded as covid absences (compared to 7% nationally) and that there had also been an increase in referrals to the attendance team. It was added that from September 2021 schools were more able to record covid related absences and therefore the data from September would be more accurate, and this would be available from June 2022.
- Excess weight – officers confirmed that due to the lack of data collected during lockdowns there was no updated data available but it was estimated that excess weight had increased by 5% due to lockdown and reduced physical activity.

Members then raised a number of questions and comments, which included:

- **Excess weight** – it was suggested that a report be brought back on the progress with the Medway system wide partnership work and officers undertook to schedule an update into the work programme.
- **Children social care audits (ILAC7)** – it was asked whether auditing 29 cases was sufficiently representative. In response, officers confirmed that this was only one method of quality assurance and there were more methods in addition to this.
- **Underweight** – reference was made to a recent briefing note that had been circulated and asked if the narrative regarding to data relating to underweight children could be included within the narrative provided for the excess weight measure. Officers undertook to look into this.
- **NEETs** – in response to a suggestion of incentivising young people to engage in education, employment or training opportunities (EET), officers undertook to feed the idea back for consideration. Officers also undertook to check the reason for the 49 fewer 16-17 year olds and whether this purely related to them reaching adulthood. It was added that there had been a large reduction in available places for EET activity

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following a reduction in national funding available and work was ongoing to increase opportunities.

- **Smoking at delivery** – following previous suggestions to change this target it was confirmed that targets were reviewed annually and this was a target that was currently being evaluated for the forthcoming refresh which would be presented to Council in February 2022.
- **Social worker recruitment** – officers confirmed that this continued to be a challenge but efforts to promote recruitment and stimulate the market continued.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

497 Work programme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report and updated the Committee on progress with filling the teacher vacancy on the committee. She confirmed an initial sift of the 5 applicants had taken place with the Director of People and Assistant Director, Education and SEND and the next stage would be to consult the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Opposition Spokesperson on the proposed selection. This would then lead to a formal recommendation for the Committee to consider at its January meeting which would then be forwarded to full Council for approval.

Decision:

The Committee agreed the work programme as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, subject to accepting the proposed changes, outlined in italic text on Appendix 1.

The Committee noted the update relating to the teacher position on the committee.

Chairman

Date:

Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer

Telephone: 01634 332104

Email: democratic.services@medway.gov.uk

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